

A Paradigm of Emotional Existence “Being”

Asceticism

The Buddha practiced tranquility to the highest level possible. At first he learned this from his meditation teachers but he could not reach the highest point, because the teachers he depended on had not reached the highest point. So he gave up the teachers and decided to practice asceticism with five ascetics. He even stopped eating till he became like a skeleton. Then he tried to stop breathing. This resulted in his fainting, when some thought he was dead. When, however, he woke up, he thought: *“All these days I have been trying to learn from others and do what other people did. Now I will go my own way.”*

He started to eat to strengthen his body and mind. He recalled how as a child he had entered the first ecstasy automatically by letting go of everything. He thought: ***“This is what I will do now. I will let go, give up everything.”*** This way he gave up all the five hindrances, lust, hate, lethargy, worry, and indecision. This resulted in the appearance of the five constituents of ecstasy:

Entering Ecstasy

- (1) The first ecstasy: with inquiry, inference, contentment, comfort, and stillness of mind.
- (2) Then the second ecstasy: with contentment, comfort, and stillness of mind.
- (3) Then the third ecstasy: with comfort and stillness of mind.
- (4) Then the fourth ecstasy: with stillness and apperception.

Then he began to enter the cognitive ecstasies:

- (5) The realm of infinite space
- (6) The realm of infinite perception
- (7) The realm of nothingness
- (8) The realm of neither sensation nor no sensation
- (9) The cessation of sensation and feeling.

1 st <i>Jhāna</i>	Inference (<i>vitakka</i>)	Inquiry (<i>vicāra</i>)	Rapture (<i>pīti</i>)	Comfort (<i>sukha</i>)	Stillness of Mind (<i>ekaggatā</i>)
2 nd <i>Jhāna</i>	→		Rapture (<i>pīti</i>)	Comfort (<i>sukha</i>)	Stillness of Mind (<i>ekaggatā</i>)
3 rd <i>Jhāna</i>		↓	→	Comfort (<i>sukha</i>)	Stillness of Mind (<i>ekaggatā</i>)
4 th <i>Jhāna</i>			↓	→	Stillness of Mind (<i>ekaggatā</i>)

This last state was the absolute unconsciousness (*avijjā*), where the consciousness was absent though the body was alive. It was when he woke up from this state that he began to become aware of the mental process by which the “world” that we are aware of, the “self” we are aware of, and the “suffering” we are aware of, came into being. All this came out of the process of perception, conception, cognition, and affection. These psychophysical activities did not arise due to the commandments of a supernatural Creator, but only because of the presence of the necessary conditions.

This experience made him realize that the mind is not an entity separate from the body, but an activity of the body, which when perceived subjectively appears to be mental and when observed objectively appears to be physical. In other words, experience is dichotomized into a subjective and an objective. **He also saw that the cognitive process creates the objective “world,” and the affective emotional process creates the subjective “self,” and the resulting suffering.**

When we examine the formula laid down by the Buddha as the Concurrence of Antecedents, we find that it begins with unconsciousness. This means the mental process of creation of objects begins from a state of unconsciousness or insentience as experienced by the Buddha. The Building process begins with feeling and sensation (*vedanā and sannā*). As one goes through the cognitive ecstasies backwards, one comes to the fourth affective ecstasy and from there to (the third affective ecstasy where breathing begins.

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4 th <i>Jhāna</i>				←	Stillness of Mind (<i>ekaggatā</i>)

It is only at the first ecstasy that conceptual thinking (*vitakka vicāra*) begins. The Buddha pointed out that construction is of three kinds:

- (1) Mental Construction (*Citta Saṅkhāra*): feeling and sensation (*vedanā-sannā*)
- (2) Verbal Construction (*Vacī Saṅkhāra*): inquiry and inference (*vitakka-vicāra*)
- (3) Physical Construction (*Kāya Saṅkhāra*): breathing in and out (*assāsa-passāsa*).

Objects are constructed by these three processes. The feelings and sensations are like the bricks that build a wall. The object is built using questions and answers such as: What is this? This is a tree, or this is a dog, or this is a man. The physical energy for this activity of construction is obtained from the breathing. The construction ends up in perception (*vinnāna*).

What is perceived is the object in the form of an image (*rūpa*), and identification name (*nāma*) that identifies the object. In this same way the five senses go into action individually and collectively to form images with identities. Whatever information is obtained through sensory perception is transferred to the brain where thinking occurs to give meaning to what is perceived. Thus the sensory world (*salāyatana*) or a world made of Six Sensual Realms of vision, sound, smell, taste, touch, and concepts (*dhamma*) is created or comes into “Being”. With the creation of the sensory world, the process of cognition (*phassa*) is completed and a world consciousness arises by being conscious of an external world.

We have heard that when the Buddha was born he walked seven steps and said, “I will not come into existence again (*natthi idhāni punnabbhavo*).” This is because he pronounced that he was going to Awaken from the dream of existence. Some people misunderstand this as saying, “I will not be reborn again.” The term “*Bhava*” does not mean birth. The word for birth is “*Jāti*”. The term “*Bhava*” means existence. Of course, the English translators have termed it becoming, which means coming in to being, which is similar to birth. The real meaning should be “being” or existence. According to the Buddha, being or existence precedes birth (*bhava paccayā jāti*). The Buddha asked the question, “What is the reason for birth?” And he answers, “**Existence is the reason for birth** (*Mahanidāna Sutta, Digha Nikāya*).”

“Existence is the reason for birth (*Mahanidāna Sutta, Digha Nikāya*)” means that the process of perception begins from a state of not knowing anything, which we have called insentience (*avijjā*). This does not mean that sentience or perception can be called *vijjā*. This term *vijjā* has a meaning beyond mere perception leading to full comprehension (*parinnā*) of the Fourfold Supernormal Reality. This is why *vijjā* is something that has to grow up to full comprehension. Therefore, visual perception (*vinnāna*) is only the beginning of *vijjā*. The next level of growth is six-fold perception (*salāyatana*), which grows further up to objective consciousness (*phassa*). Beyond this is the consciousness of a “self” (*bhava*) due to personalization of the subjective experience (*upādāna*) created by an emotional reaction (*tanhā*) to feelings (*vedanā*). The “self” that was created is only a notion without an identity. Therefore, an identity of “self” is created by pointing to something that exists by occupying space and time. This way, the body is identified as the “self” (*sakkāya ditthi*). Once the body becomes the “self,” that “self” (*atta*) has a past, present and a future. **The past is birth (*jāti*), the future is death (*marana*) and the present is the process of aging (*jarā*) of the “self.”**

The tradition holds that our problem is rebirth (*jāti*) but the *Sutta Pitaka* points out that the real problem is the concept and feeling of existence (*bhava*), which is a delusion. Nirvāna has been described by the Buddha not as the ending of rebirth (*jāti nirodho*), but as the ending of the delusion of existence (*bhava nirodho Nibbānaṅ*), by awakening from the dream of existence (*samma sambodhi*).

This Concurrence of Antecedents (*paticca samuppāda*) is a continuous mental process that goes on unconsciously, throughout our lives, producing a new “world” and a new “self” intermittently every moment. This continuous dynamic process of change gives rise to a false sense of permanent static existence. In other words, it is a continuous process of change (*nānattatā*). From birth to death, it is a process of change or becoming, and not a static presence or being (*bhava*).

Having created a self this way we are bringing about a paradigm of relationships between the “self” that exists, and the “objects” perceived as existing. The relationship is filled with emotions in the form of likes and dislikes. It becomes a paradigm of emotional existence. We normally live in this paradigm, which is a mass of suffering. It is this paradigm that the Buddha called “Being” (*bhava*). This paradigm of being is the paradigm of insecurity and suffering (*dukkha*) because it is filled with emotional disturbances.

The comprehension of the Concurrence of Logical Antecedents leads to the recognition of the fundamentals. This recognition brings about the paradigm shift from existence to experience. **Experience is all that we can talk about. All other things originate from experience. Experience is the most fundamental of all.** (*Sabba Sutta – Samyutta Nikaya*).

People normally think: the world exists first. Then “I’ come into existence and meet the ‘world,’ and I see the world.”

The fact, however, is: seeing arises first and it is only from the seeing (or perception) that the ‘I’ and the ‘world’ come into being.

In the seeing there is only the seeing (*Ditthe dittha mattaṃ bhavissati*): there is neither the seer nor the “seen”.

In other words, **experience precedes existence**. Existence does not come before experience as it is commonly thought. **Existence is only a product of the process of perception, which is experience. Experience produces the subject and the object that are supposed to exist.** It is this experience that the Buddha analyzed into the five constituents of the process of perception.

Modern research on the brain has indicated that this process called experience is the activity of a part of the brain called the cerebral cortex that does the thinking. The brain of course is a part of the body. Therefore, it is the body that does the thinking and not the mind. The term “mind” refers only to three activities of the body: thinking, feeling and perception. **Thinking and feeling are technically called cognition and affection.** The Buddha had three terms for these activities: perception (*vinnāna*), cognition (*mano*) and affection (*citta*).

It is with cognition (*mano*) that we make meaning out of what we perceive. Perception is only the reaction of the organism to stimulation by the environment. We are organisms in an environment. We have five senses that can be stimulated by the environment. The organism reacts to this stimulus and so perception takes place. What is perceived is brought to the brain by nerves and the cerebral cortex or neocortex gives meaning to what is perceived. This giving meaning to what is perceived is called cognition. **According to the meaning given by cognition an emotion is aroused.** This arousal of emotion is called affection. **The emotion aroused is expressed in action.** This action is called karma (in Sanskrit), or “*kamma*” (in Pali). The action may be to obtain what we desire, to get rid of what we hate, or run away from what we fear.

This arousal of emotion is what is called stress today. **Stress is a disturbance of the body and mind, if continued too long it can be damaging not only to the body and mind but also to others around and society in general.** All crimes in the world, all wars, murders, terrorism, and every problematic human disturbance are a result of emotions. These emotions are blind and unconsciously carried out but dependent on the necessary conditions.

It is only the cognitive faculty that is sensible. It is the cognitive faculty that should dominate our mind, and not the emotions, but very often it is the emotional or affective faculty that dominates our mind. This is what makes a human being an animal. **What is special about the human being is the cognitive faculty.** The glorious aim of the Buddha was to make the normal half human being a supernormal fully human being.